MARVEL COMICS

390
SEP '95

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

AVENGERS

BEFORE...

THE CROSSING

DEODATO PALMER

STILL $1.50

I WARN YOU--

--GET OUT OF MY WAY--

--OR I CAN'T BE HELD RESPONSIBLE!

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STAN LEE PRESENTS A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE OF THE MIGHTY AVENGERS...

CAMPFIRE TALES

BOB HARRAS AND TERRY KAVANAGH STORY
BOB HARRAS, SCRIPT
MIKE DEODATO PENCILER
TOM PALMER, INKER
PAUL BECTON, COLORIST
BILL OAKLEY, LETTERER
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
MARK GRUENWALD EDITOR IN CHIEF

EARLY SUMMER IN THE ADIRONDACKS...

...THE PERFECT TIME AND PLACE...

...FOR EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES TO ALLOW THEMSELVES THE RARE PLEASURE OF A DAY IN THE COUNTRY.

FWIIIP!

SPA-KLUNSH!

WATCH THIS, LUNA!

AGON'S SAKE DEATHCRY!

YE KNOW HOW I HATE GETTING SPLASHED!

LET'S PLAY--

--A GAME OF TOSS--

--AND CATCH!

WOOK, WOCKJAW--

--DADDY GO FAST!

KAWNN

WAS THAT GREAT--

--OR WHAT?!

CHILD, I WAS TRYING TO GET ME BEAUTY REST, I WAS!

I'M SORRY, MARILLA. REALLY I AM!

IT'S JUST THAT AFTER WEEKS OF BEING INTERROGATED BY HENRY PETER GYRICH, THE ORIGINAL PUSS-FACE HIMSELF--

--IT'S SO GOOD TO BE WITH EVERYONE AGAIN!

AYE, YE'VE HAD A HARD TIME OF IT, THERE'S NO DENYIN'.

FORGIVE ME FOR BEIN' CROTCHETY, FOR I AM GLAD TO SEE YE BACK WHERE YE BEGAN.

GO AHEAD, CHILD--SPLASH AWAY! ENJOY YESELF.

SNIFFF!

PANT! PANT!

SORRY, LOCK-JAW--

--THIS IS FOR US BIPED TYPES.

RRRR

SWORDSMAN DIDN'T MEAN IT, LOCKJAW. WE'LL GIVE YOU SOME LEFTOVERS, I PROMISE.

NOW STAND BACK WHILE I LIGHT THE FIRE.

FWOOSH!

THIS PLACE IS LOVELY, PHILIP.

THE AIR IS SO INCREDIBLY FRESH--

--AND I SWEAR, I'VE NEVER SEEN PLANTS LOOK SO... GREEN.

YES, IT WAS KIND OF TONY STARK TO LEND MAGDALENE AND ME THIS PLACE...

...WHILE WE ADJUST TO THIS WORLD.

WHINE!

SOON, BOY. I PROMISE.

BUT YOU ARE RIGHT ABOUT THE SURROUNDINGS.

THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL...

...ABOUT IT.

CRYSTAL, IS ANYTHING WRONG?

N-NO.

I JUST HAD THE *STRANGEST* FEELING SOMEONE WAS *WATCHING* ME... FROM THOSE TREES.

DO YOU WANT US TO CHECK IT OUT?

OH, NO!

IT WAS JUST A *PASSING* SENSATION--

--AND AN ODDLY COMFORTING ONE, AT THAT.

CRYSTAL.

LUNA'S ASKING FOR YOU.

HERCULES, WE'VE GOT COMPANY.

STAND BACK LOCKJAW.

THERE MAY BE SPLINTERS A' PLENTY.

WOOF?

VERY IMPRESSIVE, OLYMPIAN!

NOW THAT YOU'RE MORTAL AGAIN, I THOUGHT YOU'D LOST *ALL* YOUR STRENGTH.

I'M GLAD TO SEE I WAS WRONG.

I CAN *STILL* GIVE YOU A RUN FOR YOUR MONEY, *MAGDALENE...*

WUMP!

SNAP!

...NOW LET'S FINISH GATHERING THE FIREWOOD.

SNIFF!

BUT YOU *HAVE* CHANGED.

EVEN IN THE WAY YOU SPEAK.

LOOK!

LOCKJAW!

WOOF!

WOOF!

COME BACK HERE, BOY!

WE'LL DISCUSS THE *MYSTERIES* OF MY *IDIOM* ANOTHER TIME, MAGDALENE.

LOCKJAW!

HOW *FAST* CAN YOU MOVE, BOY?!

IF YOU'VE TELEPORTED INTO ANOTHER DIMENSION AGAIN, I'LL HAVE YOUR HIDE!

BUT IF THAT DOG GETS LOST IN THESE WOODS, LUNA AND DEATHCRY WILL BE *MISERABLE!*

HE RACES DEEP INTO THE WOODS.

AND NOTES THE LUSHNESS OF THE FOREST...

...THEN HE REALIZES HE HAS BECOME QUITE...

...LOST.

HO THERE, FELLOW.

THE BEASTS HAVE LED YOU ON A *MERRY* CHASE INTO THE *GREEN*, HAVE THEY NOT?

REST NOW AND WELCOME TO MY HUMBLE GLADE.

?

THIS I DID *NOT* EXPECT.

WHO *ARE* YOU, LAD?

THE GREEN IS *FILLED* WITH MYSTERIES.

AS TO MY IDENTITY?

LET US SAY A FRIEND TO YOU--AND *ALL* WHO GO BY THE NAME *AVENGER*.

THREE HUNDRED MILES, DUE SOUTH...

...MIDTOWN MANHATTAN.

SPECIFICALLY, THE OFFICES OF THE **PRESTIGIOUS** LAW FIRM OF GALS-WORTHY, FORSTYE, AND SOAMES...

...WHERE ONE WOMAN, **JANET VAN DYNE**, SOCIALITE, HEIRESS AND SOMETIME AVENGER...

...WAITS...

...SOMEWHAT IMPATIENTLY.

IT ISN'T LIKE **HANK** TO BE LATE.

HE **KNEW** HOW NERVOUS I WAS ABOUT THIS MEETING.

HELLO, BEAUTIFUL.

HANK!

OH, SWEETIE, AM I **GLAD** TO SEE YOU!

HEY, HEY-- YOU'RE SHAKING! CALM DOWN, HON!

O'LYNCH IS PROBABLY JUST GOING TO SCOLD YOU FOR OVER-SPENDING AGAIN!

DR. PYM. JANET.

COME IN.

O'LYNCH. HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE YOU HANDLED JAN'S SIDE IN OUR *DIVORCE.*

YES... WELL... THAT WAS *UNPLEASANT,* BUT A *LONG* TIME AGO.

WE'RE *ALL* FRIENDS NOW, I HOPE.

OF *COURSE* WE ARE, *LIAM.*

NOW, CAN WE CUT TO THE CHASE? WHY DID YOU *SUMMON* ME HERE?

I *HARDLY* SUMMONED YOU, JANET.

I'D SAY IT WAS MORE IN THE VEIN OF AN *URGENT REQUEST.*

BUT THE SITUATION *IS* SERIOUS.

AS YOU KNOW, YOUR FATHER LEFT YOU *WELL* PROVIDED FOR.

HIS INVESTMENTS-- HIS *ENTIRE* STOCK PORTFOLIO, THE TRUST FUND HE ESTABLISHED FOR YOU *WERE* EXTREMELY SOUND.

UH-OH.

I DON'T LIKE THE WORD "WERE."

IT'S THE *DARNDEST* THING, JANET.

BUT STARTING ABOUT A WEEK AGO, *EVERYTHING* WENT *SOUTH.*

I LIKE *THAT* PHRASE EVEN LESS.

HOW *BAD* IS IT, LIAM?

EXTREMELY.

YOU'RE IN VERY REAL DANGER OF LOSING *EVERY-THING.* AND WE CAN'T SEEM TO STOP IT.

I'M SORRY, JANET.

JAN...

...ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

OF COURSE I AM, SWEETIE!

SO I'M *BROKE--*

--THERE'S *ALWAYS* CREDIT!

NOW WIPE THAT *GLUM* LOOK OFF YOUR FACE, LIAM!

COME ON, I'LL BUY YOU TWO LUNCH!

DR. PYM--DO YOU THINK SHE *HEARD* A WORD I SAID?

EVERY SINGLE *SYLLABLE,* O'LYNCH.

JAN IS A-- *UNIQUE--* INDIVIDUAL.

TO SAY THE *LEAST!*

THE MOUNTAINS.

DUSK.

CALLED BY SOME, THE MAGIC HOUR.

I'LL HAVE ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE S'MORES, IF YE DON'T MIND, MY LADY CRYS.

THEY'RE QUITE DELECTABLE, THEY ARE.

HEY, HERKSTER-- YOU ALMOST MISSED THE SING-ALONG! WE WERE GETTING A LITTLE WORRIED.

WHO'S THE KID?

HE'S BEEN GONE FOR HOURS, PHILIP.

HERCULES IS A BIG BOY, MAGGIE.

HE CAN TAKE CARE OF HIM-SELF.

I KNOW, BUT--LOOK--! COMING OUT OF THE WOODS, IT'S HIM AND HE'S BROUGHT SOME-ONE WITH HIM!

I AM A WANDERER.

A TELLER OF FORTUNES AND FUTURES.

I OFFER MY SERVICES, IF YOU'D LIKE.

HEL-WO.

HELLO, LITTLE ONE.

MY NAME IS TUC.

YOU HAVE A FIRE. GOOD.

FIRE AT TWILIGHT HELPS ME WITH MY GIFT.

SWORDSMAN, MAGDALENE-- BRING LUNA AND JOIN US.

?

PIETRO, ISN'T THIS ALL A BIT WEIRD?

THIS BOY COMES OUT OF NOWHERE AND YOU ACT AS IF YOU'D KNOWN HIM FOR YEARS.

PHILIP, YOU FORGET PIETRO IS A GYPSY, BORN AND BRED.

FORTUNE TELLERS ARE HARDLY *STRANGE* TO HIM.

BESIDES, THERE'S *SOMETHING* ABOUT THE BOY.

CAN'T YOU *FEEL* IT?

HEY, GUYS--

--LOOK!

THE FIGURES ON THE CARDS!

THEY'RE *US!*

ACE of CUPS

XI

OF COURSE.

I AM A *SENSITIVE*...

...AND MY CARDS ARE A *PART* OF MY GIFT.

NOW, BE SILENT, PLEASE-- AND STARE *DEEP* INTO THE FLAMES. LET THE SMOKE *ENGULF* US...

...AND SEPARATE US FROM THE WORLD OF DISTRACTION.

BUT YOU KNOW THAT ALREADY, DON'T YOU, MAGNUSSON? SINCE YOUR ILL-STARRED BIRTH, YOU HAVE SUFFERED GREATLY FROM THE CAPRICIOUSNESS OF FATE.

THIS IS NOT WHAT I EXPECTED.

LIFE SELDOM IS.

BUT YOUR HOUSE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE ONE OF GREAT POWER, BOTH GRAND AND GLORIOUS.

OR IT MAY SUFFER THE MOST TRAGIC OF DESTINIES. BEWARE THAT PATH, FOR THE SINS OF THE FATHER ARE OFTEN VISITED UPON THE SON... AND THE DAUGHTER.

YOU, WHO HAVE ALWAYS HID YOUR FEELINGS, MARRIED IMPETUOUSLY FOR LOVE. AND YOU HAVE BOTH SUFFERED FOR YOUR YOUTHFUL ROMANCE. BUT YOUR DESTINY IS LINKED TO HERS, QUICKSILVER.

YOU ARE, IN TRUTH, SOULMATES. BUT REMEMBER, EVEN THE STRONGEST OF LINKS CAN BREAK.

YOU WILL ALWAYS BE THREATENED BY THE... OTHER.

AND WHAT OF YOU, GIRL?

THIS IS TOO WEIRD. MAYBE SWORDSMAN WAS RIGHT...!

DON'T BE AFRAID OF ME. I'VE COME A FAR, FAR WAY TO THIS PLACE... AS HAVE YOU.

YOU *LONG* FOR THE STARS OF HOME, BUT THEY ARE *DENIED* YOU.

AS IS THE *TRUTH*, AS WELL, BY BOTH THE WELL-MEANING AND THE *CRUEL*.

BEWARE THIS TRUTH. FOR WHILE IT *MAY* SET YOU FREE--

--NATIONS AND EMPIRES SHALL TREMBLE AND FALL. BLOOD WILL FLOW...

... AND THE STARS THEMSELVES *WEEP*.

BOY, WHO *ARE* YOU?

IN THE WOODS, I THOUGHT YOU A LOST CHILD, BUT NOW--

NOW YOU WONDER IF YOU DID RIGHT BRINGING ME TO YOUR FRIENDS?

THEY ARE *DEAR* TO YOU, AND THAT IS GOOD.

BUT DO NOT LET PRIDE IN YOUR ASSEMBLAGE *BLIND* YOU TO A VIPER IN YOUR MIDST.

YOU HAVE SUFFERED A *GREAT* HURT, HERCULES, BUT YOU WILL ALL SOON KNOW ANOTHER EVEN GREATER.

REMEMBER THE *PAST* OF THIS TEAM OF WHICH YOU ARE *SO* PROUD-- AND *FEAR* IT.

IT'S GOTTEN COLD, IT HAS.

AND DARK.

BOY...

...WHY DO YOU CRY?

M-MARILLA...

...I--I WANT YOU TO KNOW...

REMEMBER THAT ALWAYS.

?

...LUNA LOVES YOU SO.

TILL THE DAY I DIE, BOY.

SHE LOOKS LONG INTO HIS FACE...

...AND DEEP INTO HIS SAD, SAD EYES.

AND SOMEHOW, SHE KNOWS.

AND IT IS ENOUGH.

THAT'S ALL I NEED TO HEAR, REALLY.

THAT'S WHAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT TO ME... FOR I *LOVE* MY LADY CRYS'S FAMILY AS I WOULD MY OWN. *ALL* THE FAMILY, BOY.

I DON'T NEED TO KNOW ANYMORE.

NO, I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU DO.

THEN, MY TIME HERE IS--

"--DONE."

WE'RE *BACK*?!

WHAT HAPPENED?!

FOR A SECOND YOU ALL LOOKED AS IF YOU WERE IN A TRANCE!

I KNEW YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TRUSTED THAT BOY--!

THE BOY--

--GONE!

AS IF HE WERE NEVER HERE?!

WHO WAS DAT?

A FRIEND... I THINK.

NOW COME, CHILD.

THE MOON IS RISING... 'TIS TIME FOR ALL WEE CHILDREN TO BE ABED AND DREAM LOVELY DREAMS.

THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN...

...WHEN THE NIGHT STILL HOLDS FAST.

H'LO.

GOOD EVE TO YOU, BIG SISTER.

I DID ALL THAT I COULD.

BELIEVE THAT-- *PLEASE.*

PRAY FOR ME, LUNA.

PRAY FOR US ALL--

"--FOR THE STORM IS COMING."

YOU MUST READ ***AVENGERS: THE CROSSING*** *-- A SPECIAL 48-PAGE SAGA THAT BEGINS THE EPIC THAT WILL CHANGE THE AVENGERS* ***FOREVER!***

c/o Marvel Comics 387 Park Ave South
New York, NY 10016
Ralph Macchio: The Big Waste
Matt Idelson: a little waste

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

T-MINUS 0!!!!!!

Ever since last January, when we announced the impending makeover in our AVENGERS franchise, the excitement and interest in the associated books has reached an unprecedented level, culminating in a fevered pitch that has gone far beyond our wildest expectations. Now, seven months later, the moment we've been awaiting as eagerly as you is at last upon us. Even as you read this, no doubt you already have a copy of...THE CROSSING (How's that for a dramatic pause? Wethinks we shall milk it a great deal more upon this page.), our 48-page book to launch the aforementioned storyline and franchise. In fact, you're probably reading this *after* checking out that masterpiece, so we'll forego what's become the regular hype and instead give thanks to the wonderful team of people on staff who contributed so much to THE CROSSING.

First off, a great deal of credit must go to Romita's Raiders, that classy group of guys working under the legendary John Romita. They include: Brian Moyer, Wayne Murray, Yancey Labat, the simply-adorable Pond Scum, and their field leader, Darren Auck. Thanks, guys, for helping to make THE CROSSING so dang good!

A big-time tip of the cap goes to Kevin Tinsley, our cover coordinator, and Matt Maley, letterer-extraodinaire, for providing the final efforts that made THE CROSSING cover so pretty to look at, as it reflects in the summer light.

Also, three cheers to Linda Gilmore and Melisa Danon in manufacturing, who not only helped to make this project run as smooth as silk, but resisted clubbing us when things fell behind.

Of course, our thanks would not be complete if we didn't mention Nel Yomtov and Mike Marts, teammates of the very best kind, and nice fellows in their own right, and Mark Gruenwald, the wonkiest Editor-In-Chief anyone could ask for.

Finally, a "hey, you're okay" to Dan Buckley, our erstwhile Marketing guy who's gone over to Fleer so that he might ridicule us from afar–the last laugh *will* be ours!

Before we dive into the mail on issues #385 and #386, we'd just like to mention that the look of the AVENGERS is about to change–drastically. The first hint of that should be evident both within and without THE CROSSING, a mark of quality that will be carried on in the monthly book beginning in August. The fun is about to begin!

–THE RALFING

Dear Ralph and Mark,

Opening shot of a woman so beautiful, elegant, classy, intelligent, foreboding and strong. This is how I describe page 1, how else can you describe it? It may not be the spotlight I would have liked, but it does showcase some of her finer attributes.

I do like seeing Pietro and Crystal spending time together. Whether or not their marriage is indeed "fixable", it is nice to see the range of emotions expressed. By both writing and through artistic measure.

I'm not quite sure why I didn't pick up on the fact that Deathcry is only sixteen before now, but it does raise a few questions.

1) Wasn't Vance Astrovik turned away due in part because of his age? He was about this age, was he not?

2) Is it because she is an alien that she is remaining, or is it because Captain America is currently not a member/active member?

3) Does sixteen Terran years coincide with sixteen Shi'ar years?

4) Is this why she's on monitor duty or because of the mysterious flame which emanated from the trans-temporal door?

Hercules' newfound humanity is already being handled much better than it was in the past. I like the direction this appears to be heading.

The Red Skull!?! Now this is a cliffhanger if ever I saw one. With an ending like this one, thirty days is just too long to wait for its continuation/ conclusion.

The writing and artistic chores for this book are absolutely incredible! Earth's Mightiest Heroes is definitely one of Earth's mightiest reads. My thanks and admiration to all involved.

Steven C. Leitman
1361 1/2 Highland St.
Columbus, OH 43201

Hey, thanks for all those nice words. To answer your many queries:

1) Yeah, Vance was the same age, but he had parents to take care of him and he was way too young to be an Avenger. D.C. in turn was sent to the team *ostensibly* for their protection. She has nowhere else to go. Also, she's more of a ward of the team than an active member.

2) See above.

3) Who knows? Suffice it to say that she's the equivalent of an Earth-born sixteen year old.

4) Both.

Howdy!

It's been a while since I last wrote you, but I wanted to congratulate you on another fabulous issue of AVENGERS. I've been consistently pleased with the stories ever since Bob Harras took over the writing chores, and the art is still topnotch as well. Congrats to Mike Deodato...he's managed to slip into the book's definitive style, and blends with Tom Palmer's inking incredibly well.

Thanks for making the characterization the most important aspect of the storytelling. Fight scenes are exciting, but what I enjoy most is reading about characters that have believable personalities, and are developed enough that I can care about them as people.

I hope that Quicksilver will be around for a good long while. He's always been a favorite of mine, and I've enjoyed seeing him assert himself. Will we possibly be seeing him in a leadership capacity? I appreciate the way you're handling his relationship with Crystal. In comics, it's just too often that we see relationships restored overnight, and that's just not the way it works. It's a healing process, and one that you're portraying very well.

Finally, you're doing something with the Black Widow! I've been looking forward to seeing her in the spotlight for some time. I hope you have something in mind for her that will put her in a more active role, and a new costume wouldn't hurt either.

It's interesting seeing Hank Pym back in action as Giant-Man. This was, to be frank, my least favorite of identities. I'm hoping you have something in mind for him.

I hate Deathcry. Please get rid of her. She's currently the only thing I really don't like about the book. I mean, I don't really like the new logo either, but I can live with it. Deathcry's been around for like two or three years now, and has yet to grow on me at all. Thumbs down.

I've also noticed that the roster is starting to get pretty thin. Doctor Pym and especially the Black Widow don't take that much of an active combat role. Cap hasn't been seen in months, and the Vision quit at the end of his limited series. This leaves only Quicksilver, Hercules, and Crystal to pick up the slack.

So, seeing as a letter to you guys wouldn't be complete without suggestions for new members...

Hawkeye. He's still in mourning over Mockingbird's death, but the Avengers are his family, and it's about time for him to come home.

Carol Danvers/Ms. Marvel. I always liked the character, and always hated "Binary." Regardless, she's been in virtual limbo for over a decade. It'd be nice to see her again.

The Wasp. Well, if she can't join, it'd be nice to at least have her drop in once in a while. She was such an important part of the team for so long, it's just not the same without her.

And of course, Captain America. I hesitate to mention him, because I know plans are in the works for him–and technically, he's still on the team. But, even more so than the Wasp, when he's not around, it really shows.

Well, that's about it for now. I hope you'll take my suggestions to heart. Good luck, and keep up the good work!

Aaron Devrick
3572 San Jose Ave.
Merced, CA 95348

Yup, we're taking those suggestions to heart, all right. Hawkeye does indeed return home (at least for a visit) in THE CROSSING (Where have we heard that name before?), and the wondrous Wasp appeared this very issue, something of an introduction to both the latest chapter of her story and...you got it, THE CROSSING. As for the lovely Miss Danvers, look to the stars, and you might just spot her in the company of the Starjammers.

By the way, Natasha (along with a whole passel of her comrades) will be getting a new set of threads in...yup, THE CROSSING. In fact, they're being sewn together right now, that's why they're out of uniform this issue.

Dear Ralph,

AVENGERS #385 was a return to the kind of story that placed this title in the exalted position it now holds. The Pietro/Crystal/High Evolutionary Saga and the resolution of the Taylor Madison story were both well done, but a bit of adventuring was now well overdue.

This issue was the quintessential Avengers story: a mysterious threat, a couple of dangling plotlines (the trans-temporal door and Cap's condition) which are expanded on slightly, and rubbing Nick Fury the wrong way.

The resolute way in which she pursued the information Ivan had for her was right in character for the Black Widow. The first six pages really reminded me of a *Modesty Blaise* story, an environment Natasha would be most at home in, with Ivan calling her "Princess" and the espionage background.

Pietro and Crystal seem to be getting on well, although there's no sign of the intense love they had when they first got married. At least they've found a level of marital stability for now. The story of their relationship is not resolved, however, and with the Black Knight still around, any such stability may be illusory. Still, it was as nice to see them working together on the doorway at the mansion as it was to see Pietro's reaction to Crystal's tenderness towards Hercules.

Speaking of whom: keep investigating his reaction to last issue's events. This should be a valuable lesson in humility and humanity for him. Give him back his immortality eventually, but let him experience what it's like to be "merely" human first.

By the way, do the events depicted in the HERCULES limited series and Graphic Novel by Bob Layton from the 1980s still hold true? In other words, if they do, then won't that mean that Hercules will regain his immortality eventually (and go through further lessons in humility)?

I'm glad to see Deathcry getting more exposure. However, considering how briefly she's been on Earth, where the heck did she pick up all the teenage-speak she spouted this issue? And do you know how much it *annoys* me? It's worse than the way Kitty Pryde spoke when she first joined the X-Men. I'm pleased that you established her age and the fact that she's a resident at Avengers Mansion (even if not yet an Avenger). But *please* cut out the teenage-speak! Her language when she first arrived on Earth is far preferable.

I noticed that Terry Kavanagh contributed to the story. While he and Bob worked well

together, I hope that Bob isn't planning to pass the scripting reins over to someone else. Bob has done such a great job on AVENGERS for so long now that he's an institution on the title, right up there with Roy Thomas and Jim Shooter.

The art was great, naturally: Mike Deodato and John Buscema on breakdowns, the brilliant new artist and the grand master who is the artist I most associate with this book (just edging out George Perez). And Tom Palmer's finishing linked the two styles perfectly. I don't have much more to add on the art, it was a real treat. I do want to mention the bottom of page 13, though, for a lovely portrait of Crystal.

That wraps up #385. It felt good reading a story that gets back to the essence of what makes this title so enjoyable for me. See you all for #386 for more on what the Red Skull is up to.

Mark Dito
32 Davies Ave.
Springwood, 2777
N.S.W. Australia

Sorry to see D.C. isn't exactly growing on you. When she first showed up, she was frightened, hurt, and confused by her inexplicable exile. As time has passed, she's grown more comfortable with the Avengers, thus she's started showing her true personality more. This became evident in the VISION limited series last fall.

And by the way, Terry's here to stay as the co-plotter of the Avengers, *and* he's the new writer on IRON MAN, beginning with issue #319!

Dear Avengers team,

some thoughts on issue #385.

I loved that splash page! The moon, the city, the pose, the prose. All in all, a class entry. When has Natasha looked so dynamic?

The issue was a good, solid, piece of storytelling: a tip-off leading the team into the heart of the action. Marvel's critics seem to think the big company can't do story-driven comics anymore. Not so.

As always, comic books lead the way when it comes to portraying women as dynamic, admirable, heroic leaders. While movies and t.v. seem to accentuate the "victim" aspect of the female, comics like AVENGERS (with characters such as Tasha) highlight the woman as a figure capable of earning the respect and loyalty of her followers.

Ah, if only life imitated art! High praise for the exchange between Tasha and Herc where he stood by her, despite their differences. I've had the personal misfortune to see a friendship, forged over a year ago, go sour due to work-related differences. If either one of us had behaved a bit more like these "heroes" then our friendship might still be intact.

Hey! Gosh. Wonder if it's this attitude towards life and towards each other, and *not* their powers, that *really* makes them "heroes?" Nah. never. Not in a Marvel comic.

Michael Leddy
42 Dristernan
Drumshanbo
Co. Leitrim
Ireland

If there's one thing that typifies AVENGERS each month, it is definitely the focus on character and story over pinups and revealing outfits. Comic book heroes face the difficult challenge of being both realistic for people to relate to while at the same time fulfilling the fantasies we'd like to see ourselves in. Serving as barometers for morality seems to be the most feasible position for them to attain. Thus, while they might experience differences on a personal level, those differences hopefully don't interfere with the personal relationships between the characters, and that's a good lesson for everyone to learn.

Dear AVENGERS,

Finally, we get to see the spotlight turned on the Black Widow. At last! She's my second favorite Avenger ever, certainly the best in the current lineup, and it's wonderful to finally see her get the attention she deserves. This is a character with rich potential just itching to be explored. Her background, especially, makes her a fascinating character. She has been a spy, a government agent, a ballerina, a hero, even a villain, and is highly respected among the superhero community, and we got to see most of these factors this issue. She is also the leader of the team, and so deserves to be spotlighted more than any other member. As Nick Fury said this issue, "She's the best."

As for Mike Deodato and Bob Harras, what can I say? These guys get better with every issue. Bob has turned around this title since he came on board, but it is only recently, with the addition of Mike Deodato that the AVENGERS have come to life. Steve Epting was amazing, and I still consider him to be one of the best (his work on FACTOR-X is wonderful), but he never did what Mike has done, and given this book a truly enjoyable atmosphere. Bob and Mike–long may they reign!

Now, on to something really important... the costumes. Why on Earth are Crystal and Black Widow wearing those ridiculous jackets when they look a hundred times better without them? If you're going to give them sexy costumes, at least let us see them. I don't mind jackets when they are practical, like at the end of this issue, to protect them from the cold, but why would Crys be wearing one indoors, and why would Natasha ever wear one when her abilities depend on her being able to move around freely? Surely, the jacket must impede her acrobatic prowess. Just because Rogue looks good in a jacket, doesn't mean that every other Marvel hero needs one. And give Deathcry a haircut. If she wants to act like other teenagers, she will want to look like them too. By the way, why does she even have hair, when other Shi'ar have feathers?

Speaking of Deathcry, hasn't she changed? From sarcastic, vicious alien, to carefree, fun-loving teenager. Brilliant character development, Bob. You wouldn't realize it, but her transition from warrior to teenager reflects how much she has grown up in recent times. I didn't like her at first, but I'm enjoying her a lot more lately. As for the rest of the team, Hercules' grief and touchiness were brilliantly portrayed this issue, and it's looking more and more as if Pietro and Crystal are going to get back together. Now you know I don't approve of that. When Dane comes back, Crys is bound to fall for him all over again, and, as I've been saying for ages, Quicksilver belongs with Val Cooper in X-Factor. I know that no one else agrees with me, but, hey, color me opinionated.

It was nice to see John Buscema involved in this issue. I still remember his days on AVENGERS. I used to think his art looked great. When I look at those issues again, I feel the same way. Good on you, John.

I can't remember a time when I've been enjoying this title more, so keep me happy by continuing to produce some excellent comic books. I have every faith that you will. So, until Mike draws a bad picture of Crystal, make mine Marvel!

Gordon Sharman
74 Darwin Rd.
Tilbury, Essex
Engalnd

Dear AVENGERS,

Issue #385 was beyond superb. Pitting the Red Skull against the entire Avengers team would not have been feasible a few years back, but with the decrease in sheer powerhouses on the team, it has made that scenario more than possible. My only fear is that the Red Skull's more evil than usual appearance is the foreshadowing of some royal changes, which may include death.

This issue, and the previous two have been nothing short of the usual excellent AVENGERS fare. For a time after Steve Epting's departure, I felt the art and storylines would decline in impact, but with my personal interest in a state of resurgence, I must say that is not true.

By the way, what ever happened to the Swordsman, Magdalene, and the Vision. I sadly enough missed the limited series.

Steve Woodgeard
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Vision regained his lost emotions during his limited series, and elected to leave the team for a time in order to find himself (so to speak). Happily, he's coming home in...THE CROSSING. As for Swordy and Maggie, they're back in the fold this very issue, and keep an eye on the man with the blade, 'cause he's got a role to play in the months to come. (By the way, sorry to delete your ballot for the Avengers poll, but we promise your votes were tallied with everyone else's.)

AVENGERS,

I was very, very impressed by issue #386. Let me tell you why.

Never been a big fan of the Skull, but never really disliked him, either. You are revitalizing him for me, making him a villain that I respect. That's very good.

"Ah yes, the Russian." Ouch, ouch. Great panel, and a great line.

Widow takes on the Skull. A "fantastic" fight sequence. When Natasha said, "Your time ended fifty years ago. No one's afraid of you anymore," I realized that she was exactly right. That's how I've felt about the Skull ever since I first encountered him. But the entire battle was excellently done. The Widow has fantastic moves, and I began to see the experience that decades in the Marvel Universe has given her. Only one, eensy, teensy complaint: the zip-a-tone seemed a little bit too coarse. It was distracting. Could a finer grain have been used? (I told you it was eensy.)

Natasha's near-miss on the Skull was also well carried out. No matter how good she was (taking on the Skull in single combat was pretty tough pickings), she's still hard on herself.

Y'know, the layouts were also quite good. Man, I haven't enjoyed an AVENGERS book like this in a long, long time. Congratulations.

Two other bits, from nowhere in particular.

The power drain effect that hampered Crystal, Pietro, and Herc seemed a bit artificial. That is, I understand that it was the Widow's show and all, but the plot device was too heavy.

Pursue Widow's relationship with Cap. These feelings have been around for a long, long, time. She's never struck me as the type to ignore these feelings. I'm asking the same thing from the Captain America people, so put your heads together.

Keep up the good work. Looking forward to the return of the Cosmic Cube.

Jason Vester
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Whoops! Running out of room here, so...no more zip, and the power drain was more than a plot device. As shown in "Taking A.I.M.," it was designed to control the Cube. As for Natasha and Cap, keep an eye on the latter's book for a, shall we say, startling development that might throw a wrench into your desired scenario.

NEXT:

"The Crossing" commences with death, loss, and uncertainty. By Harras, Deodato, and Palmer.

ZONE